

Well, that doesn't sit right with a lot of folks. By linking a bipartisan proposal to a partisan reconciliation package, our Democrat colleagues are showing their cards. The cards show that they really want this reckless tax-and-spend spree to pass, and they are fundamentally unserious about a true infrastructure package that would make needed improvements to roads, bridges, and broadband possible, and that is a shame. By tying budget reconciliation to infrastructure, the American people are the ones who will be left out to dry.

I have always said that I would be in favor of infrastructure. We all would be—a great infrastructure deal, where every penny of every dollar goes toward roads, bridges, broadband, and waterways.

But the American taxpayers know they have to pay for it. They know eventually they will have to pay for it, but they need something that they are putting their money into that they can get something back. But we cannot let a partisan tax-and-spend spree bog us down and hold back the American taxpayers.

This summer, so many Americans are traveling across the country. This includes most of us who travel across our States, me across Alabama. As I have been on the road, I am reminded once again that we need improvements to our infrastructure.

It is more than just fixing potholes on a city street. We rely on infrastructure every day, during our drive to work, trucks moving our goods up and down the highways, when a ship leaves a port with cargo, or when we just get on the internet. All those are infrastructure.

Good infrastructure allows people to move freely, keeps our products flowing, and maintains America's competitiveness in the global economy.

In Alabama, we have got 100,000 miles of public roads, and we need them to be in good shape. Driving on poor roads costs Alabama drivers a total of \$4.2 billion every year. Because of things like vehicle operating costs, traffic congestion, and car crashes, we can tell our roads need work.

We have got 1,000 condemned bridges—1,000—just in the State of Alabama. Out of 16,000 bridges, we have 1,000 that have been condemned that need to be repaired in the worst way.

In an increasingly online world, getting our rural areas access to reliable internet is more important than ever. Whether it is for work, healthcare, or going to school, we need broadband across our entire State. Investing in our infrastructure is investing in our future success. It is way past time to step up and act on this. The American people need help with infrastructure, and that is what we should be concentrating on.

But despite that, our colleagues on the left still can't resist playing politics here. Before the actual bill text of the bipartisan infrastructure framework could be written and before the

pay-fors were negotiated, Leader SCHUMER has called a vote on the framework.

Now, I know it is pretty hard to get a majority of skeptical Senators to vote on anything, much less something that has not even been written yet. We don't even have the bill written, but we are going to vote on it.

But these are serious times that call for serious actions. So we should be very careful considering this framework, not rushing toward arbitrary deadlines.

As our country's economy is trying to recover from the pandemic, anything and everything we do has to be thoughtfully considered, especially when it comes to passing legislation that costs money in the long run. And this is going to cost a lot of money.

Because this is the taxpayers' money, after all—your money—we owe it to the taxpayers to spend their money in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Personally, I don't think it is ever a good time to raise taxes, but I can tell you the absolute worst time is when we are still coming out of an absolute global pandemic.

There are commonsense ways to pay for some of this new infrastructure spending. Chief among them is re-directing all that unused COVID money that the Democrats insisted on spending earlier this year, and there is a lot of it left.

Let me be clear. Raising taxes on the American people should be a non-starter for any potential bill. It certainly is for a lot of people.

Folks, simply put, a dollar spent on traditional infrastructure is a dollar well spent. But it has got to be done in a smart and targeted way, and we can't allow Democrats to hurt Americans by creating an if-then scenario.

Let's spend some time on the infrastructure bill and do it the right way. Then we can turn to debating all the spending that our colleagues on the left have their sights set on. But we have to do the infrastructure bill first.

Hopefully, Congress can deliver the targeted results our country deserves, results that don't increase the tax burden on the American people.

Throughout this debate, you can count on a lot of us to be a strong voice for making infrastructure work for three or four things: Alabama, our neighbors, our country's rural areas, and the American taxpayer.

We can get this done. Let's just do it the right way.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 1520

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I rise again—again—to call for every Senator to have a chance to vote on our bill, the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act. It is time to move the most serious crimes like sexual assault and murder out of the chain of command and put them in the hands of the most capable people in the military—independent, impartial, highly trained uniformed prosecutors.

This is an issue that deserves urgency. I have been calling for a full floor vote since May 24. Since that time, an estimated 3,136 servicemembers will have been raped or sexually assaulted and more will have been victims of other serious crimes. While I am heartened to see, after many years of pushing for reform, that growing numbers of our colleagues, the Department of Defense, and the President have acknowledged that we must move sexual assault and related crimes like sexual violence out of the chain of command, it is simply not enough.

I ask my colleagues to consider what it truly means to have special victim prosecutors looking only at cases of sexual assault and related crimes. It means that all the myriad crimes that are often linked to special victims' cases will get left out and pushed into a system that is not trained to see them for what they are.

Let's just take a simple case of a forged check. Say a soldier takes his girlfriend's checkbook and forges her name. If a commander looks at that, they are likely to take that at face value, see it as a simple, cut-and-dried case of someone stealing money from someone else, and move forward with nonjudicial punishment.

If a military prosecutor was to look at that same case, they might see something entirely different. That is because prosecutors are trained to see linkages between crimes. They are taught to ask different questions. So when they see a forged check, they ask: Is there more happening here? And there usually is.

Research has shown that financial abuse occurs in 99 percent of domestic violence cases. Financial abuse can be the means by which an abuser gains control in a relationship, and it is often the main reason a survivor stays with their abuser. While a prosecutor who has worked on cases of both financial crimes and domestic violence would know that, a commander wouldn't likely know.

The truth is, the realities of intimate partner violence go far beyond sexual assault and harassment. It can include forging checks and carrying out other forms of financial fraud, as well as other serious crimes.

We know that child endangerment can be linked to domestic violence and intimate partner violence, as can kidnapping. Arson can be the tool of someone attempting to cover up these

crimes. And murder, manslaughter, and murder of a pregnant woman can be, and often are, the final, tragic culmination of domestic violence. When these types of crimes are presented to commanders, they may be just the tip of an iceberg—the tip of an iceberg of cases that we all agree should be handled by a special prosecutor.

So if we truly want to help survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, we have to acknowledge that some of those crimes don't happen in a vacuum. We must remove all serious crimes out of the chain of command and into the hands of trained prosecutors who have the education, training, and experience that these cases require and that our servicemembers deserve.

The Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act does exactly that, and it is supported by the major veterans service organization groups, as well as groups like the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which recognize the true impact of this reform. It is also supported by a bipartisan, filibuster-proof majority of Senators who should be allowed the opportunity to cast their vote.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate Committee on Armed Services be discharged from further consideration of S. 1520 and the Senate proceed to its consideration; that there be 2 hours for debate equally divided in the usual form, and that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on the bill with no intervening action or debate.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REED. I object, Madam President.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I have been to the floor several times with Senator GILLIBRAND not only to compliment her on the hard work she has put into this bill for so many years now—I think going back to 2013—but also to give my support to this effort as well. She doesn't need the compliments. She doesn't want them. But I say that she is entitled to the hard work that she has put into this bill, and it is time that we pass this legislation.

We are told that the bill will be considered by the Armed Services Committee as part of the NDAA. That is not a good reason to deny consideration as a stand-alone bill on the floor, which is what Senator GILLIBRAND has been to this floor numerous times to get done, and each time was objected to.

Now, the Armed Services Committee serves this Senate well for what it does

on military policy, but when it comes to this particular piece of legislation, it is unfortunate that the Committee has a track record of gutting provisions that they don't like, even after the provisions receive the votes to be included.

On another issue, I want to recall what the Senate and House conferees did to a bill to prevent cuts to the Air National Guard. The provision was included in both the House and Senate NDAA but was quietly struck from the conference report. And bringing this bill separately on the floor of the U.S. Senate and getting it passed will prevent like things from happening to this sexual assault legislation.

So this legislation is needed now.

I think Senator GILLIBRAND has said it has 66 cosponsors, and that is exactly right, because there are far too many women and men in the Armed Forces being sexually assaulted and most never see justice. The rates of retaliation are too high, and prosecutions are too low.

Now, over the past month, I have heard favorable comments about attacking this issue from President Biden. I have heard an independent commission at the Pentagon speak to it. I have heard Secretary Austin speak to it. Now, whether they specifically support this legislation or not, they at least have admitted that sexual assault in the military is a major, major problem that needs to be dealt with in some way, but I am saying it will never be dealt with until we get Senator GILLIBRAND's legislation passed.

More importantly, it has the votes—66 votes in the U.S. Senate, for sure, and probably more when people have to put their vote on the line to be a stand-alone piece of legislation. It is time for the legislation to finally move forward, and I would urge my colleagues to allow it to proceed.

But as has happened before, we found out today is not that day. But that day should have been years ago, considering this problem is getting worse from year to year and, more importantly, the fact that it is such a big problem, and retaliation is such a big problem that you don't even get accurate statistics on the number of people that have been sexually assaulted, because they know if they go forward and report it, they will be retaliated against. It is a situation that we have dealt with for too long without the solutions that have been promised working, and so the only way to solve this problem is with Senator GILLIBRAND's legislation.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, over the last 16 months, no community has been spared from the devastation of COVID-19. The virus itself has claimed the lives of more than 600,000 Americans, including more than 50,000 Texans, and we are still gaining a fuller picture of the far-reaching consequences of this pandemic.

We know that the mitigation efforts led to the closure of countless small businesses and upended the livelihoods of millions of workers. The transition to virtual learning robbed children of valuable time alongside their peers in the classroom. And the emotional and financial stresses of the pandemic led to devastating consequences for our friends and neighbors who were already in a vulnerable situations.

As families spent more time isolating at home last year, we saw an increase in domestic violence. Individuals who were already experiencing anxiety and depression faced even greater challenges during this difficult period. And those battling substance-use disorders faced an even steeper uphill climb. On top of the stress and isolation of the pandemic, many lost access to treatment facilities and outreach programs.

No community has been spared from the wrath of the opioid epidemic. In 2019, there were more than 70,000 overdose deaths in America, a devastating number. Now we have a much clearer picture of how this crisis worsened in 2020.

Last year, more than 93,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That is more than a 30-percent increase over the previous year. It marks the largest annual increase in at least three decades.

Following years of fighting to turn the tide on the opioid epidemic, this is a stunning blow and a deep disappointment. Here in the Senate, this issue is about as bipartisan as they come. As I said, every State, every community has been hit by the scourge of opioids, and every person in this Chamber, I believe, wants to turn the tide on this crisis.

In 2016, thanks to the leadership of our friend Senator PORTMAN of Ohio, and the hard work of a bipartisan group of Senators, we passed what became known as CARA, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, to help end this devastating cycle of drug abuse and death. Just a couple of years ago, we celebrated some incremental progress. In 2018, drug overdoses were down, or deaths from drug overdoses were down 4 percent from the previous year, the first decrease in nearly three decades.

But, unfortunately, that trend was short-lived. Overdose deaths increased in 2019, and they skyrocketed in 2020. Now is the time for the Senate to take further action and help the American people fight back.